

Before We Criticize...

By Heath Rogers

There are times when mistakes are made and things need to be pointed out. And, unfortunately, we all know that offering criticism can sometimes make a bad situation even worse. Serious thought needs to go into what we will say. Maybe it would help if we would ask the following questions before offering criticism:

1. Why am I doing this?

Do I really want to help this person, or am I just doing this to make myself feel better? Am I trying to improve the situation, or do I just want to say, "I told you so!"? What is my motive? "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Regardless of what the world believes, we don't have the right to let off some steam at the expense of another. Criticism that is only going to make us feel better needs to be kept to ourselves.

2. Do I have a right to criticize?

Was I available when this person could have used some help before? Can I sympathize with what they are going through? Can I offer some positive suggestions to go along with the criticism? Some people like to just sit on the sidelines and criticize the labors of others. Such people really have no right

to criticize.

3. Have I examined myself?

It is not right for me to give criticism that I am not willing to take. Jesus says that I must make sure that the log is out of my eye first, then I can offer to help my brother get the speck out of his eye (Matt. 7:3-5). Criticism is respected when it comes from a respectable person, but no one appreciates a hypocrite.

4. What will I say, and how will I say it?

This is very important. I must choose my words very carefully. They have the power to build up or to destroy (Proverbs 12:18, 16:24). As Paul said, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6). What we say, and the way we say it, will make all the difference in the world.

5. Will it glorify God?

"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Whose glory am I seeking? Am I saying something to help the cause of Christ or just to be heard? If it is just to be seen and heard by men, then truly I have my reward (Matt. 6:1-6).



(1 Tim 4:12-16) - Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. ¹⁵ Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Sick

Jim and Barbara Kicker	Pam Dial (Laura Weldon's Mother)
Heather Adams (Luke Bridges' Cousin)	Rose Tate (Toni Herd's Cousin)
Adriana Mininno (Haley Chittam's Cousin)	Dave Bradford, Sr.
Blake Whatley (Hunt's neighbor)	Dave Brown (Friend of the Lanier's)
Marty Meeks (Toni Herd's Nephew)	Call Yvette at 734-2134 To Have Someone Put on this List

News and Notes

- Let's remember our expectant mothers: Jana Hall, Laura Humphrey, and Rachel Bradford.
- Audio CDs of Today's Sermon will be immediately available
- Congratulations to Roy and Joy Liu on the birth of Hannah on Friday afternoon.
- Here is the contact info. For our new families:

Ken and Susan Sullivanne, Spencer and Matthew
1980 Canary Drive
Auburn, AL 36830
HM. 887-1303; Cell—740-2700; Wk. 321-3312
Timothy and Manna Jones, and Riley
2431 Waterstone Circle
Auburn, AL 36832
(334) - 850-7473

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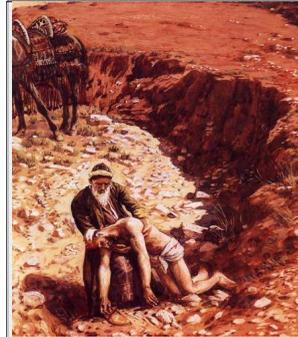
Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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A People of Refuge

By Larry Rouse



Thought to Ponder

It is so much easier to tell a person what to do with his problem that to stand with him in pain.

Do You Have a Bible Question?
Call (334) 734-2133 or E-mail: LarryRouse@aubeacon.com

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES Sunday

Bible Class9:30 AM
Worship10:20 AM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM
Wednesday
Bible Classes.....7:00 PM

Ask about our home Bible Study Groups!

Larry Rouse
Evangelist and Editor

The identifying characteristic of God's people is their love for and their involvement with one another. These identifying marks of the church of Christ are not merely outward beliefs or outward practices found only in our assemblies, but they are, in fact, shown by our willingness to lift up and care for others whenever their time of need arises. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). It is no surprise that Jesus described the separation of the saved from the lost at the judgment day as being determined by service rendered or in service that was ignored to others in their time of need (Mt 25:44-46).

Make no mistake that every child of God must be determined to do "all things" the Lord has commanded (Mt 28:20). Still it is the human side of God's commands, the willingness to sacrifice our time, our effort and our money to be intimately involved with others of vastly different backgrounds, that provides the greatest evidence of our faith in God. In order for us to help another, we must first empty ourselves just as our Lord did when He came to earth (Phil 2:1-8).

Everyone who comes to God under-

Everyone who comes to God understands their need of refuge. Our God provides a refuge, not one in a physical place, but in a spiritual place, a place that He describes as His church.

stands their need of refuge. Our God provides a refuge, not one in a physical place, but in a spiritual place, a place that He describes as His church. When one is baptized in water he is then added by God to a spiritual family described as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Our primary care comes directly from God through His written revelation, His daily provisions and through the lives of those who were also washed in the blood of Christ. We come to God broken in our sin, rejected by the world and completely empty of any good that would obligate God to us (Matt 5:1-8). It is at this point where God begins rebuilding our lives, and a major tool that He uses in that process is the local church.

The Reality of the World

In this world we will find rejection, exploitation and slander. King David once cried out to God for refuge in a world

(Continued on page 2)

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(Continued from page 1)

that wanted to see him destroyed. "Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away. I am a reproach among all my enemies, But especially among my neighbors, And *am* repulsive to my acquaintances; Those who see me outside flee from me. {12} I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. For I hear the slander of many; Fear *is* on every side; While they take counsel together against me, They scheme to take away my life. (Psalms 31:9-13)"

God responded to David's call for help by providing such a refuge with Himself and with His people. "Oh, how great *is* Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, *Which* You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence From the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion From the strife of tongues. Blessed *be* the LORD, For He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications When I cried out to You. Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! *For* the LORD preserves the faithful, And fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD. (Psalms 31:19-24)"

In the New Testament God describes how His people both receive help and give help to those who are weak and wounded. "Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed. (Hebrews 12:12-13)" What a comfort to find others willing to selflessly extend their hands to assist in my time of need!

Consider the needs of any man that comes to God for refuge.

The Truth about Sin

Jesus pleaded with men to understand the bad news about sin so that they might receive the good news. Any "comfort" that comes without first dealing with the issue of sin is a shallow and empty comfort. Sadly many churches of men have rejected the Bible as being inspired, and as a result, will never address

the subject of sin as our Lord did. "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins. (John 8:24)"

The Forgiveness of Sin

Peter instructed those who never knew the Lord to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:37-38). Christians were instructed by Peter to repent and pray to God so that "the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:22)" What a comfort to find the entire, enormous burden of your sin lifted!

A People to Share and to Stand With

The power of a local church is found in our knowledge of our own forgiveness. Those who fail to grow in the Lord were described by Peter: "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:9)" Because of this, Christians above all people, will show mercy and be quick to receive and comfort all who repent and turn to the Lord. It is this forgiveness that we have in common and that makes this relationship so rich! We may be laughed at and ridiculed by the world, for the world does not understand the basis of our lives or of our companionship (Heb 10:32-35).

A People that Help Him to Remember and Renew His Faith

The people of God have assemblies for this very purpose. "Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:23-25)" In addition to these assemblies, the bulk of this encouragement is found in a day-to-day involvement with Christians in our homes and in our lives (Acts 2:46-47).

Have You Found this Refuge?

This refuge will not be found in the wisdom of men nor in their churches. This refuge will come when you find and claim the written promises of God and stand with others who do the same. God wants to provide, but He will only do so for those who look for Him. "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)"



A Healthy Church

By Dan S. Shipley

I had suspected that we were abusing the word "sound" in reference to churches, preachers and others, but didn't realize how much until I heard a member tell of having a cousin that was not sound and had to be straightened out on the issues. It was not until later that I learned that "cuz" was 'a deacon in the Baptist church!

"Sound" suffers no injustice when applied to either people or churches, provided its use is warranted and in keeping with its scriptural sense. God employed this word "hugiaino" to convey the distinct idea of general healthiness and wholeness (1 Tim. 1:10; 1 Tim. 6:3; & Titus 1:13, e.g.); therefore we would do well to use it thusly. As physical health is more than merely having a few healthy organs, so spiritual health involves a great deal more than just being straight on whatever the current issues happen to be. Perhaps if we would speak in terms of spiritual health instead of soundness" we would not be so apt to be misunderstood. For instance, I would welcome a "Directory of Healthy Churches". Trouble is, who would compile the listings? Who outside the local church could say it was healthy and who inside the local church would say it wasn't.

In the case of the Laodiceans, God has shown us the possibility of a church being blind to its own condition (Rev. 3). They saw themselves as being spiritually healthy, having (need of nothing while God saw them as being on their spiritual deathbed "miserable and poor and blind and naked." Being sick is bad; being sick and not knowing it is worse. Worse, because remedies are

Let us further see that healthy doctrine is the lifeblood of healthy churches. All members must know and love Bible truth. They don't resent it being preached plainly and forcefully, they love it (1 Thess. 2:10); they desire it (1 Pet. 2:2) because they hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6). But they not only love truth, they love each other as taught by Jesus in that truth (Jn. 15:12).

neither sought nor received by those who think themselves healthy. If self is to be examined with reference to being in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5), why not the many "selves" who act as one? A little honest introspection will show us that being healthy before God is more than big memberships, big buildings, big contributions, having "big" preachers and taking "big" stands on issues.

Let us see that a healthy church is one whose members are truly converted to Christ. Not to the church; not to the family or the preacher; but to the Lord! Everything depends on our attitude toward Him! To love Him is to keep His commandments (John 14:15); to serve Him is to serve others (Mt. 25). He must be the leaven of our lives; we must continually strive to conform to His image and be careful not to repeat the mistake of the Ephesian church by leaving our first love (Rev. 2:4).

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